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SUBJECT: ADVISERS TO GNP CANDIDATE PARK GEUN-HYE STRESS
U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE

Classified By: DCM Bill Stanton. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On March 29 foreign policy advisers to opposition GNP presidential candidate Park Geun-hye told us that a Park administration would restore the U.S.-ROK alliance as the central pillar of ROK foreign policy. They stated that Park's priorities would be made explicit during an April 9 foreign policy speech at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Seoul. Unlike the current ROK administration, Park would pursue a tougher style of engagement with the DPRK that did not overlook security issues nor "flatter" Kim Jong-il with unreciprocated assistance. The advisers also said that the USG was too "hasty" in its efforts to resolve issues with the DPRK. Despite polls that suggest that the December election is the GNP's for the taking, the advisers were apprehensive that any significant achievement -- progress in the Six-Party Talks, an inter-Korean summit or a Korea-U.S. FTA -- could complicate their chances to regain the Blue House for the first time in a decade. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On March 29, the DCM hosted dinner for four foreign policy advisers to opposition presidential candidate Park Geun-hye to discuss Park's views on the United States and North Korea. The advisers included: Lee Jai-chun, Chairman of the GNP Policy Advisory Committee and former Ambassador to Russia; Lee Byong-ho, former Ambassador to Malaysia and former Deputy Head of the National Intelligence Agency (predecessor to the National Intelligence Service); Koo Bon-hak, Director of the Institute of Diplomacy and Security Studies at the Hallym Institute of Advanced International Studies; and Walter Paik, Standing Member of the GNP's International Relations Committee.

U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE THE PRIORITY

13. (C) Ambassador Lee Jai-chun and his colleagues criticized Roh Moo-hyun's administration for increased friction in U.S.-ROK relations during his term. Park Geun-hye, they said, would strive to remedy ongoing problems, such as base returns, host nation support, the U.S. chancery relocation, and USFK training issues. "Things will be different" under a Park administration, Lee said. Although they did not get into specifics, Lee said a Park administration would place more emphasis on the U.S.-ROK security relationship. Lee informed the DCM that on April 9, Park would deliver a

foreign policy address to the Foreign Correspondents Club in Seoul and emphasize that the U.S.-ROK alliance would be the "backbone" of her security policy.

DELAY THE FTA?

14. (C) Asking about prospects for the Korea-U.S. FTA, Lee noted President Roh had announced he would address the nation on April 1 about the FTA. This implied to Lee and his colleagues that an agreement would be reached soon. Lee suggested, however, that if the FTA negotiations could not be delayed until after the December election, perhaps the final FTA ratification could occur next year. Otherwise, he claimed, passage of an FTA could cause opponents to inject anti-Americanism into the presidential campaign, which might catapult a progressive candidate into the Blue House as in 2002.

NORTH KOREA

15. (C) Lee insisted that if elected, Park Geun-hye would also undertake a different style of engagement with North Korea. Roh was too eager to engage with North Korea and had overlooked real security issues, he said. Despite the DPRK's October nuclear test and initial suspensions of ROKG aid, Seoul had recently resumed fertilizer and food aid. Roh's policy was too "flattering" toward the DPRK; he had bent over backwards to give as much as he could to the DPRK regime.

16. (C) Lee also charged that the USG was too "hasty" in improving relations with the DPRK. Lee argued that after the

DPRK's October nuclear test, the USG nonetheless engaged in talks with the DPRK in Beijing and later held bilateral talks in Berlin. Under the February 13 "Initial Actions" agreement, the USG and others had also decided to provide the DPRK with heavy fuel oil (HFO) assistance and to resolve the Banco Delta Asia issue. Instead, the international community should have continued to apply pressure and take advantage of UNSCR 1718. Noting local press stories reporting on visiting CIA Director Hayden's alleged comment that the USG viewed the October DPRK nuclear test as a failure, Ambassador Lee Byong-ho said this raised a concern for some that the USG might now consider the DPRK to be less of a nuclear threat than before. Perhaps this allowed for even faster U.S.-DPRK reconciliation, he surmised. He asked if a four-way summit between President Bush, President Roh, President Hu, and Kim Jong-il might happen this year.

17. (C) The DCM noted that U.S. policy toward North Korea had not entirely changed. Over the years Washington had always emphasized the need to denuclearize North Korea through diplomacy. Last summer the USG had been blamed for being the obstacle to the resolution of the nuclear issue, even though the problem was the DPRK's decision to pursue nuclear weapons and break its denuclearization commitments. We were now once again talking to the DPRK, and some people were nonetheless still criticizing U.S. policy. Following the DPRK's nuclear test in October, the UNSC had passed UNSCR 1718 unanimously. With UNSCR 1718 in place, the USG had decided to make another push for progress at the Six-Party Talks. The February 13 agreement was structured to tie assistance to DPRK actions toward denuclearization. If the North completed denuclearization anything was possible, but if the DPRK did not denuclearize, nothing would be possible. All of this was spelled out in the September 2005 Joint Statement.

CAN PARK SECURE GNP NOMINATION?

18. (C) Lee and his colleagues appeared surprisingly confident in their candidate's ability to win the GNP nomination, despite a March 28 JoongAng Ilbo poll that had

her trailing Lee Myung-bak 21 percent to 42 percent in a crowded field for the ROK presidency. First, the advisors argued, if you added the support of the three leading conservative candidates (Park, Lee, and Sohn Hak-kyu -- who left the GNP on March 19) you reached over 70 percent, but in fact, based on past voting patterns, no single GNP candidate would likely secure more than 50 percent of the final vote in December. In other words, some 20 percent of the electorate was indicating it would support the GNP, but in the end would not vote for the final GNP candidate. Thus, they concluded, until the GNP selected its candidate in August, the polls would be soft and misleading. Second, the process by which the GNP selected its candidate relied both on GNP insiders (50 percent) and the general public (50 percent), and Park, they claimed, had more support inside the party. As a result, they concluded, Park had a good shot at the GNP nomination.

COMMENT

19. (C) Despite the conventional wisdom that the December election is the GNP's for the taking, the advisors were apprehensive that significant achievements for the Roh administration -- progress in the Six-Party Talks, an inter-Korean summit or a Korea-U.S. FTA -- could complicate the race for whomever becomes the conservative candidate. They reiterated concerns that the GNP was behind the curve on engagement with the North and that U.S. policy toward the DPRK might give the Blue House a political victory progressives could claim to help them win the next presidential election.
VERSHBOW